ES& to the NEWS
by PHYLLIS SCHLA.FLY
Box 618, Alton, Illinois 62002
Phone: **618-462-5415**

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KAREN ANN QUINLEN

The widespread publicity given last year to the mastectomies performed on the wives of the President and Vice President was probably responsible for saving thousands of lives. The human interest aroused in their personal drama did more to persuade women to have timely breast examinations than doctors' warnings and statistics about cancer could ever do.

During the last few months, there has been much publicity about the tragic case of Karen Ann Quinlen, the New Jersey girl who has been in a coma for seven months, clinging to life only because miracle machines maintain her bodily functions. Quite apart from the much-debated issue of whether she has the right to live or the right to die, there is another important issue. We are missing a valuable opportunity to allow her to render a national public service and save thousands of lives.

The second question in the Karen Ann Quinlen case is how she got in her present predicament. Some of her associates believe that her living death is the result of taking a combination of alcohol and barbiturates.

The increasing number of teenagers who are experimenting with a combination of alcohol and depressant drugs is one of the most alarming problems in the country today. A recent survey of persons seeking treatment at the drug referral service in one large city showed that 42 percent admitted mixing alcohol with other drugs.

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Drug prevention officials say that, when alcohol and depress ant drugs called downers are taken together, this creates an ex plosive "high" that may be five times as great as from one of the drugs alone. The feeling is extreme numbness, often accompanied by hallucinations. The result may be respiratory and heart failure, deep coma, or death.

The problem is partially caused by the rising cost of the tra ditional illicit drugs, the easy availability of alcohol, and the lowering of the legal drinking age to 18. The National Institute
of Alcohol Abuse reported last month that 28 percent of the nation's teenagers are problem drinkers. According to drug prevention offi cials, a typical scenario is that a teenager might be at a party sipping wine or beer, or smoking a joint, and along comes someone with a bowl of pills. Then, anything can happen.

Recent statistics also show that the alcohol-drug combination is becoming prevalent even among 13- and 14-year-olds. But it is not confined to the young. Businessmen and housewives often take a tranquilizer to get them through an agonizing day and then, without thinking, have a martini or two before dinner. The result can be devastating.

Teenagers probably won't be stopped by warnings from parents, teachers, doctors, or drug officials. But they might be deterred from danger by the dramatic lesson of what happened to Karen Ann Quinlen.

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